

Care and Buddhism

— Another Viewpoint on the Concept of Caring —

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INTRODUCTION

The nursing-care insurance system in Japan is formulated on the assumption that modern Japanese are individuals produced by modern Western communities. It is doubtful whether such individualism is applicable in Japanese communities. In the past, a characteristic feature of the lifestyle of most of the aged in Japan was their putting a consistent priority on interpersonal relations between others, without asserting their own rights or position. They realized that their social position in the community would decrease, and, in fact, a main hope was not to become a burden for their families. Today, we are often disappointed to see senior citizens in homes for the aged not expressing their views or demanding their rights, but silently accepting their situation. However, we must remember that until recently, most Japanese lived out their lives without the need to make large decisions about their lives and living situations. Is it not a kind of cruelty to abruptly demand self-decision and self-responsibility from them in the twilight of their lives?

In the nursing-care field it is said that we must have respect for the dignity of the aged. In Japan that dignity was traditionally maintained through an understanding of their practical usefulness to the community/family through their manpower for labor, wisdom & experience, ability to coordinate groups of people, and so on. Moreover, in the Japanese tradition seniors took a central role in memorial services, and by telling stories about the deceased, they create a connection between the living and those who passed before. In passing away themselves, they would become guardians, constantly looking over the family to protect them. These perceptions retained the dignity of aged members of the family and community. Family memorial services installing the deceased family member as a guardian are an institution that continues even today. But in our current modernization, perception of the practical usefulness of our aged members is being lost, and even the traditional ceremonies/institutions are undergoing changes (Shinmura 1991).

The traditional Japanese idea of respecting the aged is related to Confucianism, but this

respect does not develop automatically. According to the teaching of Confucius, we have natural feelings of love and respect for those nearest to us—mothers, children, and other near relatives. However, training and conscious discipline are necessary to amplify and apply these feelings to the extended family, region and country. And this process was considered part of study and learning in Confucianism (Zhou 1993).

As mentioned before, the idea of respect for the aged is based on a weak foundation and, nowadays, in fact that dignity seems to be steadily decreasing. In such a situation, there are calls for changing our basis for value from “doing” to “being”. Instead of valuing a person for what s/he does (his/her usefulness), we would value him/her for just being there. This is especially important in the education of people involved in caring profession.

As Mr. Hiroi said in his book about caring, the concept of caring is in conflict with modern science. He illustrated how the concept of caring is in conflict with modern science as follows:

SCIENCE	CARE
1. Isolating and Manipulating subject and controlling nature	1. Sympathy and “togetherness” with the subject in a friendly atmosphere
2. Experimental and Evidential rationality (Induction)	2. Importance of individuality and subjectivity of each subject

Figure 1. Science and Care
(Hiroi 1997. p. 167)

As we see, a scientific approach typically involves isolating and manipulating subjects and controlling nature. And science is based on experimental and evidential rationality. In contrast, the features of care are sympathy and togetherness with subjects in a friendly atmosphere. And the individuality and subjective experience/viewpoint of each subject is important.

And Mr. Hiroi argues that medical treatment as a science must change to “medical caring” in treatment of the aged. In their case, the biological body-functionality irrevocably erodes. Established medical treatment for younger people can be harmful for the aged. Forcible, invasive treatment can reduce quality of life. In this situation, in contrast to the medical model, a living caring medicine model is key (Hiroi 1997). Even in pursuit of a

caring model, there is potential for a kind of paradox. Caring professionals are conducting research to establish norms and writing manuals with the goal of increasing the quality of caring. But this scientific approach, while aimed at promoting care, can itself stand in contrast to true caring. We discuss how to develop experts in the field. But at its core, the central subject this debate should not be how to develop individual experts; it is more important to improve general human abilities. The quality of caring depends on every caring staff and his/her ability, knowledge of human nature, and creation of trusting interpersonal relations. Another proper subject of this discussion is how to educate and imbue staff on-site with a spirit of respect for others and a consciousness of their value. Recent scandals involving cruelty by caring staff highlight the need for this.

BUDDHISM AND CARING

Up to this point, I have offered a general view of actual problems, but now I will share some thoughts on care from a viewpoint of Buddhism. First, I will explain the Buddhist view of human life, then look at examples of ideal caring by Buddha, and go on to examine Bodhisattva, as a practitioner and upholder of dignity for every single human. Finally, I would like to present thoughts of the founder of Nihon-Sotoshu Dogen about the practice of care. In this way, it is possible to gain another view of caring, apart from the Western frame.

BUDDHISM'S VIEW OF HUMAN LIFE

At first I would illustrate the concept of human life and suffering in Buddhism. Buddhism looks on the craving deep inside of humans. This craving is called the "thirst (*trīṣṇā*)" or "unknowable (*avidyā*)."¹ Thirst is an inevitable desire of living beings and is so fundamental that we can refer it as an impulse for existence. In this sense it is called thirst. This craving is so deep and fundamental that we do not even recognize it. In that sense it is called unknowable desire. This craving constitutes the Self which imagines that a fixed and substantial "I" exists on its own, without relationship to others. In this way we form the normal, unquestioned cognitive frame in which we perceive our Self at the centre, confronting the outer world around us. Our Self sets itself apart from all other things, existing without relation to them, and evaluating them according to its own standards (Haya 1999). We thus

have come to value people based on how useful or useless they are. These are all foolish delusions, resulting from the dominance of craving. We don't recognize this, and are excessively attached to that fixed and substantial Self, the only way we can conceive of existing. This is why we suffer when we confront a constantly changing reality. One who notices her own craving deep inside and sees that this can only lead to damaging herself, is thus lead back to repairing inter- and intra-personal relationships, and to an enriched life-style of significance. This is the object Buddhists. To realize this object, relationships with others are vital. Although these relationships benefit others, as well, in the process of exploring and getting over your own desire, they form a kind of self-care. This relationship between your self and others is called "Engi" (pratityasamutpada, interrelationship) in Buddhism. This means also that you understand yourself here and now and the other people in your environment. How does this Buddhist viewpoint relate to our subject today, the problems of care?

BUDDHA'S CARING

At first, I would like to discuss about Buddha's caring.

"Before long, alas, will this body lie on the earth, despised, bereft of consciousness, useless like a burnt fagot." (Dhammapada, 3.19)

This is a phrase of an early Buddhist's sutra. An annotation indicates that that these words were given from Buddha to a Bhikkhu, the elder Tissa. The context is that Tissa had a swelling on his body, this grew till his bones could not stand up alone. His comrades (Bhikkhu) did not help him and he lay on the ground, on the verge of death. Buddha saw him, soaked his cloth in hot water, washed his body, let him take a bath and finally he lay him down on a sheet with clean and dried cloths. Tissa, who was cleaned in heart and body, saw the master with a fresh feeling. At that time said Buddha those phrase to him.

With that, Tissa reached the completion of his training and died peaceful and satisfied. The annotation explained it like this: He got ill, he did not know when his life would end, no one helped him and he was lying in his own excrement. This would be the saddest way to die. Originally in the tradition of the Bhikkhu, it was usual to train alone, so this situation has some reality. Buddha tended to Tissa's body and environment. Buddha made Tissa comfortable in his last moments. Then Buddha told him explicitly that the time for his end had come. Thereby, Tissa understood his situation and could prepare his mind for death.

Basic needs :	Clothes, cleanliness
Spiritual support :	Get close to each other, caring
Self-realization :	Acceptance of death and end of life

Figure 2. Buddha's care

Here you can see the visualization of care : Satisfying of basic needs, getting close to each other and helping one to accept his own situation (to die). Moreover, Buddha understood Tissa's whole mental situation and provided here an ideal of terminal care.

AN ANECDOTE OF KISA GOTAMĪ

“Good, you came here. To get medicine, go to the edge of town and go in every house. You have to get the spore of a white poppy from a house without any past deaths.” (Therighātā, 213)

Kisa Gotami was born in a poor house. She married into a family which disdained her because of her poor origin. Change came when her son was born. She was respected, now, as a mother. But one day, her son died in his most beautiful time. She carried the corpse around her town and begged : “Please, give my son medicine.” People saw her and laughed : “I haven't seen any medicine for dead.” But she continues to walk without sensing the people's laughter. One person thought that possibly Buddha could help her and said : “Woman. The only one person who knows a medicine for your son is Buddha. Go to him and ask.” At these words she went to Buddha and asked him for medicine. Then Buddha said : “Good, you came here. To get medicine, go to the edge of town and go in every house. You have to get the spore of a white poppy from a house without any past deaths.”

Satisfied with these words, she went to town and begged for a poppy, but nowhere was there a house without any past deaths. She now understood that world is full of mutability and we all die eventually. Then, she buried her son in a graveyard and returned to Buddha. He asked : “Did you get the poppy?” “The Poppy is no longer important for me and it's over. Please, give me peace of mind.” Kisa answered. Then Buddha taught her, she became a Bhikkhuni (female Bhikkhu) and obtained a state of nirvana (perfect peace).

In this anecdote, you can see Buddha's special kind of caring. This way of caring is the most effective, in another words, the only way to care for her. It was impossible to solve her problem with talk and reasoning. Her problem was that she could not accept the facts. Her relationships to herself and her environment had been destroyed she could not return to her previous situation. Buddha's reaction was not just an example of his rich wit ; he reacted in

this way so she could rehabilitate herself and overcome her difficulties. He solved not only her problem with her dead son, but he led her also to solve her fundamental problems, including the perceived shame of her origins.

In Buddha's teachings, there is not the one almighty God. Instead, he teaches us to look inside ourselves and find absolute peace of mind. Meditation has great meaning in this process of searching/watching. Basically, if you watch your heart, everything in the world, including yourself, will change. But our cognition usually seeks a fixed definition for everything, and this is one of our problems. The simple act of grasping/defining things in words itself, is to commit the mistake of fixing them. This cognitive path also causes troubles in accepting new ideas. Monitoring your own mind is the process by which you rectify the gap between one's own cognition and reality. Gotami's wanderings to get medicine for her dead child involved her trouble with acceptance. It is important that Buddha's care lead her to accept a reality that can change at any time.

Stories about Buddha, especially stories from the early phase of Buddhism, are less involved with superhuman, charismatic and supernatural elements, and there many stories on the human level. A special one is "Mahaparinibbhana sutanta" I won't go deeply into it here, but it is a sutra with stories of Buddha up to his death. It is written that Buddha, in his aged phase, was traveling with his follower Ahnanda. This story inspires us to meditate on the aged, who will die and need care, but also on the carer. This text is used in training for terminal-care, nursing and several other circles of learning (Fujiwara 2000).

MAYEROFF'S CONCEPT OF CARING AND BUDDHA

The writer of *On Caring*, Milton Mayeroff, said as follows: to care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself... Through caring for certain others, by serving them through caring, a man lives the meaning of his own life (Mayeroff 1971). In the anecdotes, the character of a carer is seen in the person of Buddha. But Buddha himself had already gained comprehension/enlightenment, so his character was Buddhistically completed. That is why, there is not an element of mutual growth in the special case of Buddha.

You could say that Buddha's care was just a charity-activity, a self-promoting realizing of his ideology, and of his religious ambitions to be in authority over others. But these elements cannot be found and this impresses even more the reader. In "Mahaparinibbhan sutanta" there are pictures of him when aged, afflicted by rotten food and complaining of his

thirst, although he had completed his character Buddhistically. By thinking about care, you can find many points in these stories. As Mayeroff said, the mission for Buddha was to live out the true meaning of his own life.

HESITATION

It is necessary to add one more anecdote: After completion of his character he went on a missionary journey, but he hesitated.

“I should not explain it, now. This law is difficult to understand for people who live under greed and anger.” (Vinaya, Mahāvagga, I, 5, 1–13)

If the enlightened Buddha had ended under the Bodhitree, he would have ended as an unknown saint but, through his missionary activity, Buddhism was born. This start of missionary activity is very important in thinking about Buddhism. He did not travel only to announce his teachings. He stood up to relieve suffering people. His own problem was to solve the fundamental agony of life, at first, for himself. But it would not be necessary to help others if this is only for himself (Haya 1999, Miyamoto 2004).

His hesitation was related to his worry that people would not understand him. But he could not just leave these people under the suffering so he turned to activity. You can say that Buddha found his meaning in life in the relief of others. There is often hesitation until one reaches the stage of living real life. Buddha reached his purpose in life, under the Bodhitree. But he felt that even this was not enough. After hesitation, he decided to make a life of believing in others, relating to them and relieving them from agony.

CONCEPT OF BODHISATTVA

Now, I would like to speak about Bodhisattva, the practitioner of Mahayana-Buddhism. This is relevant for many people when considering the concept of caring in today's world. In Mahayana Buddhism a Bodhisattva is a being who seeks enlightenment through the altruistic practice of relieving the suffering of other beings — a task for which he postpones his own enlightenment. His practice is the embodiment of compassion and kindness. The way of Bodhisattva begins with two processes. The first is to arouse the Bodhicitta, and the second is to take the Bodhisattva vow. Bodhicitta means the thought of enlightenment. To arouse the Bodhicitta is to have the thought of getting enlightenment. It is an intention of getting

enlightenment. Moreover, this Bodhicitta is the will for awakening, living with self-awareness and practicing self-completion. The vow of Bodhisattva includes the intention of salvaging all living things as a central point. Here you can see the concept of “other.” Before the rise of Mahayana-Buddhism, there was not any clear concept of “other” in Buddhism (Okayama 2005).

Now, Bodhisattva could relieve others through compassion and kindness. And the Bodhisattva does not need to be a monk. Secular Bodhisattvas appeared (Williams 2005). The rise of Bodhicitta doesn't require a religious view. It can be explained in a worldly way. It is to have the self-awareness to make your own life good. And it is to an orientation toward relationship with others. It could be said that the exploration and realization of your own life in the practice of relationship with others would be the life-style of a Bodhisattva. People concerned with caring, should have the self-awareness that they are not only contributing to a better life for others, but to their own betterment, as well. Then their career can become a great challenge with promise of significant benefit for others and themselves. Moreover, it is explained that salvaging/helping others through practice of compassion and kindness is supported by emptiness (sunyata). “Emptiness” is a central concept of Mahayana-Buddhism. It is difficult to explain, but it relates to withholding value judgement. Man discriminates and judges the value of things, but a Bodhisattva excludes these considerations. He doesn't have the mindset of asking who is more valuable than another.

BODHISATTVA SHISHYOBO

(The four ways a Bodhisattva acts to benefit human beings)

1. Fuse (Almsgiving)
2. Aigo (Loving words)
3. Rigyo (Beneficial actions)
4. Doji (Identification with those who are to be helped)

For a Bodhisattva, there are four teachings which have to be practiced. These are called Shishyobo, the four ways to benefit others. The four points of Shishyobo are Fuse, Aigo, Rigyo and Doji. Fuse means almsgiving. Aigo means loving words. Rigyo means beneficial actions. Doji means identification with those who are to be helped. I think these are very significant not only for Bodhisattva practice, but also for people involved in caring.

The founder of the Japanese Sotoshu sect, Dogen, made his own interpretation of these¹. Dogen gave Fuse a very wide meaning. Its original meaning is offering.

At first, he explained Fuse as not to covet something. The act of Fuse is to give something, and this requires that the desire of ownership be given up. Next, he said that a king, even one who rules over all the world must not covet the position of being a great ruler. He also said that anything offered as Fuse (money, material objects, teaching, kindness, etc.) is valid. The size, price or one's ownership of something does not matter, its inherent importance is obtained through the act of offering. In this way, the common, traditional meaning of Fuse was surpassed and the significance of any type or act of offering is realized. This has profound implications for our relationships to ourselves and with others throughout the world.

"Aigo" the second teaching of Bodhisattva Shishyobo, means that you have to talk to people with affectionate feeling, as you would with a baby. This is much more than simple praise. Acting with the character of Aigo will lead to its growth within you. A loving heart comes out of this affection and Aigo develops from such a loving heart. This has the power to change the world.

"Rigyo," the third teaching, means that you don't fight against someone else gaining and advantage. You understand that your advantage and other's advantage are not in conflict. You and others should gain mutual advantage. This is relevant, not only between people, but to our attitudes toward all of life, including the natural world around us.

"Doji" means to abandon the distinction between yourself and others. You care for the property, feelings, and lives of others as if they were yours. You make no essential distinctions between yourself and others. You identify with others and yourself. Dogen said that as you treat others with peace and kindness, you are able to understand and sympathize with them, as with yourself. I think that this is an important point in our relationships and in caring for each other.

CONCLUSIONS

In his younger years, Buddha already perceived birth, aging and diseases as facts of life. But most people, as they grow old, begin anew to think about their meaning of life, the value of their life and how significant it was. By reflecting on their past, they see things in a new light and will unavoidably develop in doubts and insecurity. In senescence, people are losing the things in which they had grounded their life. As they look for a substitute, the

meaning of their being becomes more and more problematic. Their own liberty decreases and changes come to relations with others. In this context, the aged have to confront aging, disease and death. From a Buddhist view, the problem is that they cannot control changes in their consciousness although there are changes in reality. Buddhism teaches that attachment blinds one. It is not strange that it is the cause of distress and agony. We all have various distresses but these are caused by ourselves and will disappear as we change ourselves.

Furthermore, Buddha's awareness is deeper. You should not just change yourself to get away from distresses and agonies. You should lead yourself to a better life by observing your life deeply and understanding that life is ruled by desire.

In Buddhism, our view of human beings and the world are in the nature of relationship between past, present and future. It is possible to change yourself by the attitude of your own mind and the way of your will. There is also a connection to others and relationship is in the nature of every being. By influencing others, you change yourself, and influences from others also change you.

To feel the reality of the relations between all things, and have this living inside you will lead you to feel the real support of others and give you the power to support others through understanding of others in truly human relationships. We must look at the reality of life and see that we must live fully every single moment. And with every single change to yourself, your environment or obstacles you face, you understand these realities and accepting them. This is the viewpoint of Buddhism. Moreover, this is the picturing of the ideal carer's way of life in Buddha's and Bodhisattva's path. Additionally, it is full of suggestions for what a care giver's career is.

If I had to enumerate its differences from a Western view of caring, the first point would be that it is not anthropocentric and egocentric. In the Western view of caring, it is assumed that the cared-for are self-completed and caring is practiced with egocentric and anthropocentric elements. In Buddhism, everyone and everything are related to each other and the focus is constantly changing. This means that rather than constantly viewing the situation from one's own, fixed vantage point, our viewpoint is mobile, thus allowing realization of wider consciousness and caring. The second point of major difference is that in Buddhism the abandonment of desires is closely related to any capacity for relationship and caring for others. Including and interpretation of Buddhism in how we view caring is quite new. But it may offer help in getting through the impasses of anthropocentrism, individualism and rationalism that we are dealing with now.

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